



F-35 Lightning II Program

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MARINE TEST PILOT MAKES FIRST F-35B NIGHT LANDING AT SEA

A key milestone on the path to declaring F-35B initial operating capability for the U.S. Marine Corps is underway.

The F-35 Integrated Test Force from NAS Patuxent River, Md. embarked USS Wasp, Aug. 12, for the second at-sea test of the F-35B Lightning II, the short takeoff and vertical landing variant of the Joint Strike Fighter.

Developmental Test Phase Two is the second of three planned tests aimed at expanding the F-35B's shipboard operating envelope for the U.S. Marine Corps. The first shipboard testing phase was successfully completed in October 2011. A milestone many point to as a turning point in F-35B development.

During the 18-day long ship trials, two F-35Bs will conduct a series of tests to determine the aircraft's suitability for sea-based operations. Pilots will expand the F-35Bs allowable wind envelope for launch and recovery, conduct first-ever night operations at sea, conduct initial mission systems evaluations at sea, evaluate the dynamic interface associated with aircraft operations on a moving flight deck, and further evaluate shipboard sustainment of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

On Aug. 14, the first DT-II night vertical landing was accomplished by F-35 Marine Corps test pilot, Lt. Col. C.R. "Jimi" Clift. Clift, a Harrier pilot by training was pleased to be part of the milestone event.

"It all went extremely well," said Clift. "Eight successful landings in one night, so we're tracking favorably along the learning curve."

Preparing for DT- II was no small task. Extensive Field Carrier Landing Practice training and qualifications wrapped up last week for the ITF at Patuxent River. Engineers completed electromagnetic environmental effects testing on the pair of F-35Bs being used in the ship trials. During the past month, F-35 maintainers have completed several actions to ensure the aircraft and support equipment were ready for shipboard operations.

Meanwhile, USS Wasp underwent a series of shipyard modifications to accommodate the F-35B, to include application of a new composite deck coating that offers additional heat protection, movement of some lights and sensors to better support F-35 landings, and installation of equipment to monitor environmental effects and collect data during F-35 operations.

At the conclusion of DT-II, the Navy and Marine Corps team should have sufficient data to support certification for future F-35B Lightning II shipboard operations in anticipation of 2015 deployment.



Lt. Col. C.R. "Jimi" Clift makes the first F-35B Lightning II night landing on USS Wasp during the second at-sea F-35 developmental test event, Aug. 14. The F-35 Integrated Test Force is embarked on the Wasp for three weeks to expand the F-35B operational envelope in preparation for Marine Corps initial operational capability in 2015. (Photo by MCSN Michael T. Forbes II, U.S. Navy)